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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet for prospective parents provides very brief discussions of the parent child relationship, the realities of being a parent, parenting techniques, parents' responsibilities, and parenting as a developmental process. Guidelines for parents of infants, toddlers, school age and adolescent children are suggested. (Author/SS)

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Growth and Development through Parenting

ELIZABETH ELMER

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National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse

Illustrations by John J. Donovan

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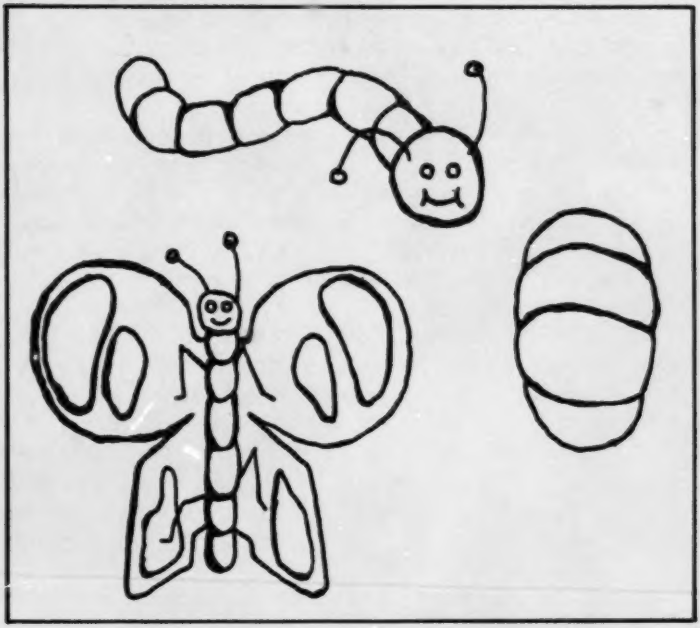
What Parents Should Know about Their Children

Most parents like their kids. When asked, they will say they want their sons and daughters to grow into stable, independent, happy adults. And parents choose child-rearing techniques that they believe will accomplish just that.

Unfortunately, because many parents lack basic knowledge about how a child develops, their techniques fall short of their goals. In their anxiety to help the child grow up, parents may fail to realize that a child must go through many changes on the way to adulthood. This is true of other organisms as well. Before the butterfly emerges



from the cocoon, it has to undergo various developmental stages, each with its own characteristics, and each vital to the next stage. Parenthood would be considerably easier and more relaxed if adults could understand that every child must experience a similar sequence of stages.

> Three-year-old Alice was being taught to resist temptation. She was not to touch the apples arranged in baskets along the hall. But they were shiny and red and just the right height, so Alice brushed her hand along them. Enraged, Alice's mother shouted, "You know better!" and hit Alice harder than she intended, with the result that Alice's back and face were severely bruised.

The mother thought Alice was being deliberately provocative. She didn't realize that three-year-olds may know what is required but very often cannot control their impulses.

What accounts for our common lack of knowledge regarding child development? A quick scan of the last few hundred years shows we've always had plenty of advice about rearing children. In the 1700s, for example, a prominent physician advocated stiff body restraints to keep infants' backs straight.[1] Even in the 1920s the Children's Bureau in its pamphlet "Infant Care" was urging parents to stop their children's thumb sucking by applying a splint to the baby's elbow so that he or she could not get the thumb to the mouth.

These samples are only a few of the many pieces of advice once available to parents. The trouble is, much of the counsel was based on conjecture or flawed reasoning rather than a solid body of knowledge. The systematic study of human growth and development began only in the last 10 or 11 decades. And even more recent is the idea that childhood is a discrete segment of life with its own unique characteristics.

During most of recorded history, adults have perceived children as miniature editions of themselves. Today's museums have many antique paintings and sculptures depicting very young children in adult postures: little girls wear women's clothes, including whalebone cinchers; little boys sport gloves and plumed hats. Rather than immature features, these children have stern faces with the heavy brows, well-formed noses, and sharply defined chins typical of their elders. In ancient times, children were deemed capable of

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[1]Cited by Stanley Goldstein in *Troubled Parents-Troubled Children* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), p. 34.

adult behavior and morals from the age of seven on. The laws regarded children and adults as equals and prescribed similar punishment for similar crimes. Children could be hanged or publicly whipped for offenses that today would be considered too trivial for the court's attention.

There's considerable evidence that many adults *still* perceive children as small adults. How many times have you heard a parent say, with respect to a child, "You have to show him who's boss"? The expression implies that the child is seen as a competitor, someone about to take over parental prerogatives. Parents even attribute adult motives and capabilities to babies still unable to speak or walk. One mother referred to her two-year-old daughter as a sexpot. As proof she pointed to the child's "ogling" of men. A father spoke of his one-year-old son as a Communist, "out to get me."

These parents' attribution of adult motives to young children is startling. Such attitudes are fortunately less widespread than those of a hundred years ago, but they still appear to affect parental practices. This becomes understandable when you realize that parents commonly behave toward their children in the ways they remember from their own childhoods. Thus child-rearing methods and attitudes are handed down from one generation to the next and often develop the power of hallowed tradition.

One of the purposes of this booklet is to bring to light how various beliefs and customs continue to influence attitudes and behavior toward children. A second purpose is to discuss several ways in which the child may affect the parent-child relationship and therefore the parent's child-rearing techniques. Finally, the booklet will offer some useful parenting techniques. Let's start where parenting begins—before the child is born—when subtle, often subconscious factors influence how we function as parents.

Some General Components of the Parent-Child Relationship

Even before conception takes place, various factors that we rarely think about are busily steering future parents in certain directions. So little attention is paid to these factors that we might justifiably call them "undercover agents." Just one example: Why do parents in the United States assume almost total responsibility for their children while in other societies assorted relatives and institutions share in such tasks? Of course it is because the structure and beliefs of our society establish parents as virtually the sole nurturers of babies and young children. Western groups like ours tend to offer little support for parents. The reason: According to the conventional wisdom, child rearing has been going on since the beginning of time. Theoretically, this means that everybody knows what to do and has the means to do it. There is no need for parent education, extra money, day care, or home help.

Paradoxically, while refusing to grant needed kinds of support, our society holds very high expectations for parents. A single mother, for example, is expected to rear her child competently, keep her dwelling adequately, and get and hold a job. If she falters,

society comes down hard by means of agency or court. Rather than Lift a Hand, the motto seems to be Point a Finger.

As the customs of society influence parenting, so do the beliefs of individual parents. Some of these beliefs pertain to the capabilities the child has at birth or acquires soon thereafter. A number of parents, for example, are certain that infants learn right from wrong by the time they are a few months old. Another influence on parenting stems from the parent's opinion concerning his or her ability to affect the child. If you believe that you cannot affect your child, why worry what to do? On the other hand, if you think your behavior with your child matters, you will invest thought and effort in it.

Another important influence on any parent, again an "undercover agent," is the parent's feelings about himself or herself. A good supply of self-esteem is money in the bank, something to draw on when things get tough. The child can also draw on this bank account, because a parent who feels worthwhile perceives the child in the same way. Almost by osmosis the child develops a sense of being valued, and his or her own self-esteem begins to grow. Confidence in self leads to the "can-do" syndrome: the wish to tackle and solve problems and a belief in one's own power to achieve.

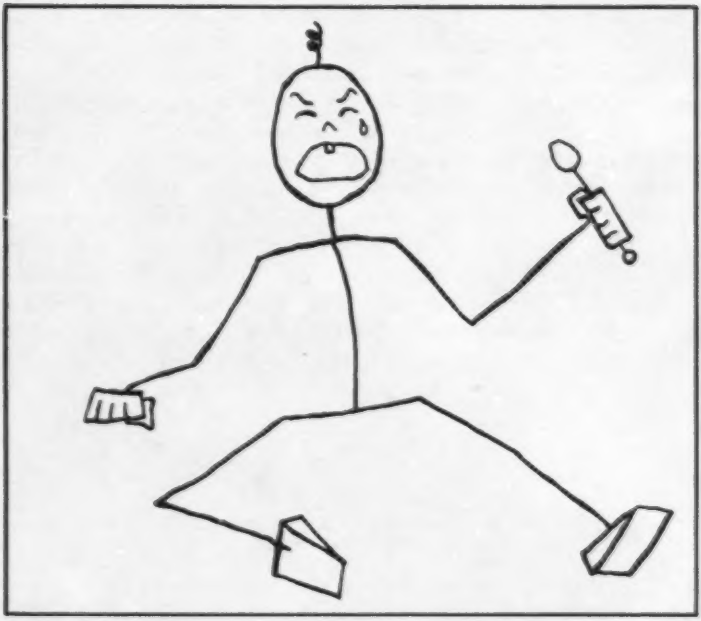
Just as it takes a long while to instill a sense of self-esteem in a child, so it takes time to develop a sense of mutual trust between parent and child. Professionals talk a lot about the necessity for the baby and young child to learn to trust an adult. Less thought is given to the reverse—how the parent learns to trust the child. Here is another place where the developmental concept is important. Once the parent accepts the idea that children *do* progress through stages, he or she can trust the child to mature at the child's own pace. Unrealistically high expectations can be shucked, and the parent can enjoy the unfolding process of the child's development.

Most adults do try to foster a good relationship with their children. When it is achieved, each member of the pair is enabled to develop psychologically. This goes for the parent as well as the child, since parenthood plumbs depths not accessible any other way. Although parent and child are necessarily at different points in development, the relationship does similar things for both. Skill in interpersonal relations, a deepening of moral commitments, and a sense of responsibility to society are among the many values fostered within the parent-child relationship. But probably such high-sounding

goals are less important to individual parents than the enjoyment and comfort they derive from having a positive relationship with their children.

The Realities of Being a Parent

Parenthood, while leading to increased maturity in the adult, also provides one of the major challenges of life. For most people, children require major changes in lifestyle. To begin with, having a baby means you *have* a baby, to paraphrase the syndicated newspaper columnist Ellen Goodman. Once you accept the responsibility for another life, you live with that unremitting responsibility for many years. This is a bold and difficult fact to adjust to. Most of us have been reared in the "me first" culture typified by freedom to go and come and incentives for self-



development, careers, and competition rather than by the ideals of service and self-sacrifice that characterized, say, the Puritan days. We are ill prepared to interrupt our accustomed ways in order to wait hand and foot on a wailing, imperious infant. With a baby, suddenly we have less time, fewer dollars, 24-hour responsibility; for a long while we may receive precious little reward. Soon come other concerns: Who will care for the child when both mother and father are strenuously pursuing a living? How can a parent develop a relationship with a child seen only at the beginning and the end of a working day? Although these and similar questions will not be addressed in this booklet, the kinds of difficulties they represent color the parents' perception of the child and hence their whole parenting approach.

Before the Baby Is Born

The particular way a parent sees a child starts even before birth, and these early attitudes may affect the relationship for years. Among the determinants are the pregnancy history, the circumstances of birth, birth order, and the like. For many parents a critical factor is whether the baby is planned or unplanned. An unplanned baby can be compared with dropping in unannounced on your friends. One friend takes it with equanimity, warmly welcoming any and all, announced or unannounced. Another equally good friend dislikes having the routine upset; she would like you to come, but please telephone ahead. Of course a new baby implies a considerably greater adjustment than a single visit; an unplanned baby may mean that the mother gives up an attractive job opportunity, or the new house is suddenly too small, or the money won't go far enough, and so forth. On the other hand, the planned baby has already been included in the family design for the future. Since the baby arrives at the propitious moment, he or she is likely to be born into a more positive environment than the baby that nobody expected.*

*This is not to imply, however, that the planned baby is guaranteed a healthy environment. Sometimes children are wanted for wrong reasons, for example, to resolve a parent's own problems. When this happens, the parent-child relationship is in jeopardy. See Ray E. Helfer, *The Diagnostic Process and Treatment Programs* (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare: DHEW Publication No. OHD 75-69, 1975), pp. 26-37.

Economic Factors

Economic factors also come into play. In the "good old days" even young children could earn their keep at the loom or spinning wheel or in the fields, where crops had to be planted and harvested by hand. Now, however, the financial cost of a child is fearsome indeed, and only a die-hard romantic would assert that children are conceived and born independently of financial considerations. The state of one's checking account has a sobering relation to one's feelings about new children.

The Infant's Characteristics

Once the baby is born, the actual characteristics of the child play a major part in the interaction with the parent. Is it a boy? We wanted a girl. Is it a girl? What, another girl! But whether the baby is of the desired sex or not, the parents' behavior will be influenced by the sex of the new addition. Although we currently see a push away from sex-role stereotyping (for example, providing dolls for girls and guns for boys), we have substantial evidence that the behavior patterns of mothers and sons are decidedly different from the patterns of mothers and daughters.

The child's health may also call forth different parental reactions. For example, the sickly, pale infant may engender impatience and frustration in the parent whose hopes were pinned on a rosy, robust child. Another parent, however, may respond to such a child with a rush of sympathy.

The child's temperament is another important influence on the parents and how they handle their offspring. We now know that the child's behavioral characteristics are part of his or her endowment and change little with increasing age.[2] A child may be predominantly positive or negative in mood, may tend toward activity or passivity, or may generally respond cheerfully or reluctantly to new people and situations. Combinations of these and other behaviors constitute the child's habitual way of acting and reacting. Most children have easy temperaments, but a few are considered difficult, variable, or "slow to warm up." Extra care and patience are needed to introduce such children to anything novel.

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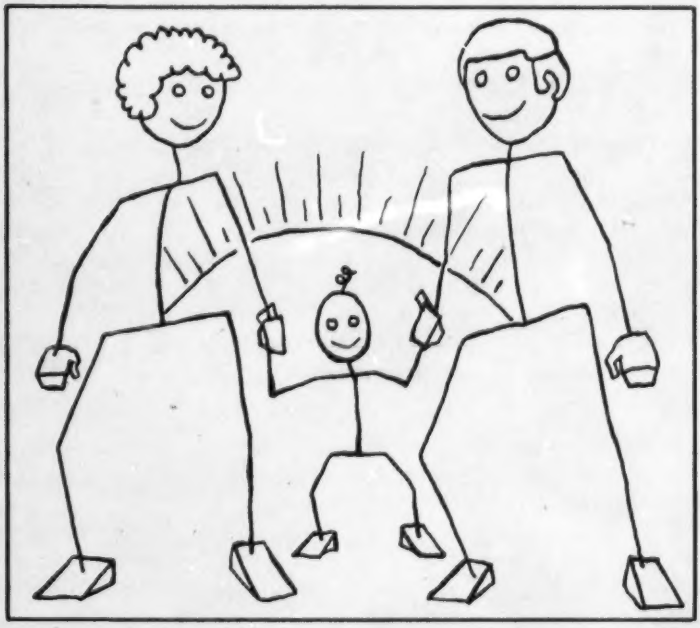
[2]Alexander Thomas et al., *Behavioral Individuality in Early Childhood* (New York: New York University Press, 1963).

It is clear that the parent-child interaction is the result of a wide variety of factors whose effects begin before the child is born. Before the pregnancy even starts, the forces of society have structured family life in certain ways. Then pregnancy itself influences the initial relationship between infant and parent. When the child is born, still other components are added: the child's sex, health, and temperament. There is the chance of a misfit between the child and the parent on many different levels, but there are also many avenues to adjustment, and that is one of the reasons why rearing a child is such an adventure.

Parenting Techniques for Four Stages of Child Development

Parenting techniques abound. Many are excellent, some are questionable, and none are practical for all children under all circumstances. This chapter will discuss techniques appropriate in general to four crucial developmental stages. These are the stages when parents are apt to feel puzzled or frustrated because either the child is literally a stranger (infancy) or normal developmental changes cause him or her to become a stranger again. Children also are likely to feel strange because they sense but don't



understand the changes—and of course this can result in their becoming irritable and being less pleasant to deal with. The four stages to be discussed along with relevant techniques are infancy, toddlerhood, school age, and adolescence.

Infancy

People anticipate a new baby with a great deal of positive emotion, especially if the baby is the first one. The textbooks have it that the glow of motherhood and the pride of fatherhood bathe the parents as they drift, with the baby, down the Glory Road.

While these emotions may indeed be present, other feelings are normal, too. Fitting a new baby into an existing family requires adjustment even when the baby is much desired. We can't choose an infant the way we pick out fresh vegetables in the supermarket, nor can we trade in a child for a model that suits us better. Parents must accept what they get; divorcing an infant isn't practical. Compare the parent-infant relationship with the husband-wife situation. In the latter case the mate is deliberately chosen, yet the rate of dissatisfaction, according to divorce statistics, is very high. So we should not be surprised that getting used to the unselected offspring takes considerable time and patience.

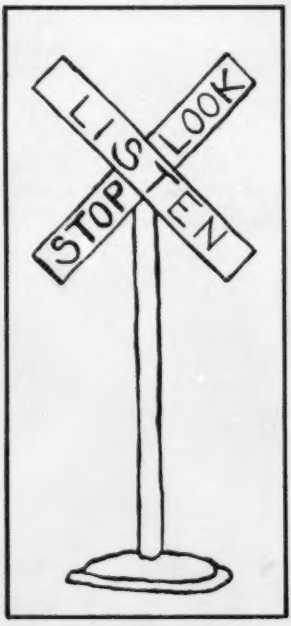
The parents' objectives in relation to the new infant are to develop a mutually satisfactory, reciprocal relationship and to actively help the baby learn to trust a dependable adult. Note the words *mutually satisfactory*. It's as important for the parent as for the child to feel good about the relationship. Two obstacles to parental satisfaction are (1) it may be some time before the baby can respond in a recognizable way, as by smiling or laughing, and (2) the baby doesn't talk, which means he or she is pretty hard to understand. It's easy to get frustrated by the necessarily one-sided conversation—in fact, some parents think of the baby as a form of sphinx, silent and inscrutable. Several important parenting techniques follow.

Learn to read your baby. This can be summarized by the old railroad sign, "Stop, Look, and Listen."

- Stop: pay attention.
- Look: at facial expressions and body movements like back-arching (distress) or turning toward someone (usually pleasure). Among other cues, these are signs of tension or relaxation that can guide you.

- Listen: to sounds such as vocalizations, crying, gurgling.

Taken together, "look and listen" can help you figure out the puzzle and can help you learn how to respond. If one thing doesn't work, try something else. Guessing is part of the game with infants.



Don't be afraid of spoiling. Babies can't be spoiled. They do have needs and try their best to express them, often by crying. When you attend to the distressed baby, you are helping to instill trust—trust that mom or dad will take care.

Talk to your baby. You can sing or hum, even recite the traffic regulations. *What* you say is less important than your saying it. Even newborns move in rhythm to the sound of a human voice. For older babies, the parent's voice establishes the possibility of communication and also helps the baby toward a beginning understanding of language.

Deal with undesirable behavior appropriately. Think about your size compared to your baby's: you're many times the infant's height and weight. Being full grown means that you can easily alter most baby behavior that bothers you. For example, you can:

- Change the baby's environment by turning him or her around or taking the baby to another room.
- Distract the baby with a different object.
- Use motion to change the scene by walking the baby or lifting him or her to your shoulder.

Don't hit, slap, or shake. The baby is still too young to understand social requirements. Sadly, from physical punishment the baby learns that the people one loves can cause pain and that aggression is an acceptable way to express feelings.

Toddlerhood

Formerly horizontal, the child is now vertical and full of beans as he or she strikes out to explore the world. As motor skills improve,

nothing is too bizarre to try—for example, climbing up the dresser drawers or hopping out the window. The child's energy seems inexhaustible, especially to the caretaker, who must be on the lookout for possible dangers.

Also inexhaustible is the child's store of curiosity. Each new experience—the moon, a grasshopper, another child—is received with a burst of delight. The toddler can absorb all kinds of stimuli, which will be grist for his or her developing cognitive processes.

During this period the child begins to give up the infantile needs of the first year. Begins to give up—yes, but not completely, because it is scary to become an individual, and the baby still needs mother and father. The child leaves the parents to explore new situations and new people but continues to need to come back to them as a place of safety.

At this time the child may also show a need to overreact: to be overly negative in speech and behavior, to defy, to do whatever is forbidden. This is another way of separating from the parents and asserting independence. It is also a response to the parents' insistence on curbing dangerous or antisocial behavior. The infant in the crib didn't need direction; the cruising toddler will have none of it. Giving up the crown is never easy.

The goals of the parent are to define the toddler's area of functioning and keep him or her out of danger; to help the child begin to differentiate acceptable from unacceptable behavior; to support the budding sense of identity; and to help the child separate as comfortably as possible. Basic to these goals, of course, is the sense of trust that was fostered in the infant. In addition, the alert parent will provide a range of experiences to satisfy the child's boundless curiosity. Some useful techniques follow.

Let the toddler go. Let him or her move away from you, then back, over and over. Toddlers need to practice repeatedly in order to get the feel of the new experience, to try out their abilities, to test the adults' reactions. The repeated nature of the performance may be annoying to parents, so it helps to view this period as a learning time, a step toward the separation that will be signified by school attendance. In adult life, too, hours of drill are necessary for a finished performance, be it typing, drafting, playing the piano.

Be ready with affection but don't press it. Some of the time it's essential for Johnny or Mary to be the bold explorer. Eventually the

toddler will return to have his or her motor charged with the kind of affection enjoyed before.

Stay away from a tangled mass of rules. Like all children, the toddler needs structure, continuity, and firmness, but these should arise from the way the family is organized rather than from rules. For the toddler to remember and obey them, the few rules should be important and basic, such as "Do not turn on the stove" or "No playing in the driveway."

***You* make the decisions.** Tell the toddler what will happen next and assume that he or she will go along. Major decisions are hard for a child in this stage, which is characterized by ambivalence. Take, for example, the situation where a toddler is to be examined by a doctor. As pediatrician and professor Ray Helfer noted, the child may choose which ear will be examined first, but he or she should not have the say as to whether the examination occurs at all.[3]

Realize that a toddler's ability to understand a rule does not imply ability to act on it. Toddlers have an amazing comprehension of language and can understand most simple communications. At that age, however, they have not acquired the inner control we call conscience. One can sometimes observe a child in the midst of a forbidden act while he or she murmurs, "No, no, don't do it." Understanding and acting on the understanding are two separate things with many months of maturing in between.

Recognize and deal with your frustrations. To handle the toddler's "no's" and negative behavior, a parent needs a saving sense of humor plus the realization of what the child's behavior means: the beginning of independence. As with most individuals, adults and children alike, a boost for good behavior is more effective than criticism for unwanted behavior. The boost might be a pat on the back, an arm over the shoulder, a word of praise, a smile, a kiss. But what to do when the toddler has exhausted all patience, humor, and tolerance—especially when a crucial safety rule has been broken, endangering the child? This is a good time for what Thomas Gordon, founder and president of Effectiveness Training, Inc., calls an "I message"—verbally expressing how you feel and why.[4] For

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[3]Ray E. Helfer, *Childhood Comes First: A Crash Course in Childhood for Adults* (East Lansing, Michigan: Ray E. Helfer, 1978), p. 47.

[4]Thomas Gordon, *What Every Parent Should Know* (Chicago: National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, 1975), p. 16.

example, "I get awfully upset when you pinch the baby, because she may get hurt." And then you have to follow the "I message" with something to impress the child with the seriousness of the act—keep him or her seated for five minutes, hold in abeyance a special treat, or something similar. But in addition to talking to your child you need a way to work out *your* feelings. Kids can make parents

angry, and there's nothing wrong with that. You have to find your own way to handle this so that you feel better but don't take it out on Mary or Johnny. Maybe it's pounding the typewriter, taking a walk, talking to a friend, yelling at the top of your voice in your own room. Find your best outlet and use it as needed.

School Age

The back and forth process of separating from and reuniting with parents has been largely settled by the time the child reaches school age, and the child is ready for the first major step away from home. The new tasks are to tackle academic subjects and learn how to get along with peers and authorities other than mom and dad.

The child is curious about how things work and is willing to spend many hours on hobbies and intriguing games. The early school years are the time for laying down work attitudes that will be useful throughout the child's life.

Parents can do much to help. They can help the child interpret the new world of school. When the child has accomplished something, the parents can provide an appreciative audience. At other times they can be the refuge as he or she experiences inevitable failures. Most important, the parents can assist the child in understanding and beginning to take responsibility for himself or herself. Following are some ways to do these things.

Communicate together. Always important, communication is vital at this stage if the child is to adapt to the marvelous world of learning. There's school, other people, and the child himself or herself—each new encounter crammed with surprises and interesting discoveries that need to be discussed. Sometimes Johnny or Mary will boast a bit—or a lot—at this stage. This is the way a child of this age continues building self-esteem. Don't worry—boasting usually doesn't last into adulthood.

Let the child go backward sometimes. Even the best kids can't win all the time. When your child makes a boo-boo and feels bad, he or she may want to act like a baby again for a little while. This doesn't last, either, but it can be a valuable source of comfort when things get tough. (What do *you* do when you're hurt or have failed?)

Help the child find alternate ways of behaving. School-age children often don't spend much thought on their actions or responses. When something goes wrong and the child is hurt or in trouble as a result, use the opportunity to understand and to talk about the troublesome behavior. Help the child figure out other ways of acting that might have had a happier outcome. Anyone gains confidence as alternatives become available. Thus the child's limited repertory of behavior is expanded, and at the same time his or her self-esteem is enhanced.

Assign appropriate responsibilities. Children like to contribute to the family—at least they like it part of the time. Responsibilities within the child's ability should be assigned with the expectation that they will be carried out.

Adolescence

This is a stage of mixtures. The adolescent reviews and repeats all the developmental stages to date as he or she struggles toward adulthood. Learning to trust another person, acquiring a solid identity, addressing the question of careers—all these and more come together for a final rerun and, one hopes, for settlement. Questions of intimacy, affective relationships, morality, peer associations, and life goals are tremendously important as the adolescent tries on various hats in the attempt to choose his or her lifestyle.

A new element is the physical evidence of maturing sexuality, accompanied by strong, often conflicting, feelings. All at once, it seems, there is a new kind of body, which is feeling and acting and thinking in strange and somewhat frightening ways. This means the adolescent must rework his or her self-image, still distressingly fragile. No wonder so many children are tormented by self-consciousness at this stage of life.

Johnny or Mary goes from child to adult and back with the speed of light. Changes in a boy's voice symbolize the adolescent's status: when he opens his mouth, the boy himself doesn't know whether he'll sound like an 8-year-old Cub Scout or a 28-year-old football hero.

The adolescent demands more privileges and freedom than ever before (for example, concerning dating and driving) but may still have little sense of responsibility for his or her actions. At this stage much adolescent behavior is geared to peer standards because the approval of peers is far more desired than parental approval. Parents suddenly are viewed as impossibly naive, embarrassingly square, and very ancient. Stone and Church recall the story of an adolescent youngster who, with the help of her mother, was dressing for her first big party. Turning to her mother, she asked, "Did they have parties like this when you were alive?"[5]

The bewildering and rapid changes in the adolescent suggest that the parents' role at this stage is limited. The adolescent is again going through the separation process, this time for keeps, and must make his or her own decisions to the greatest extent possible. So

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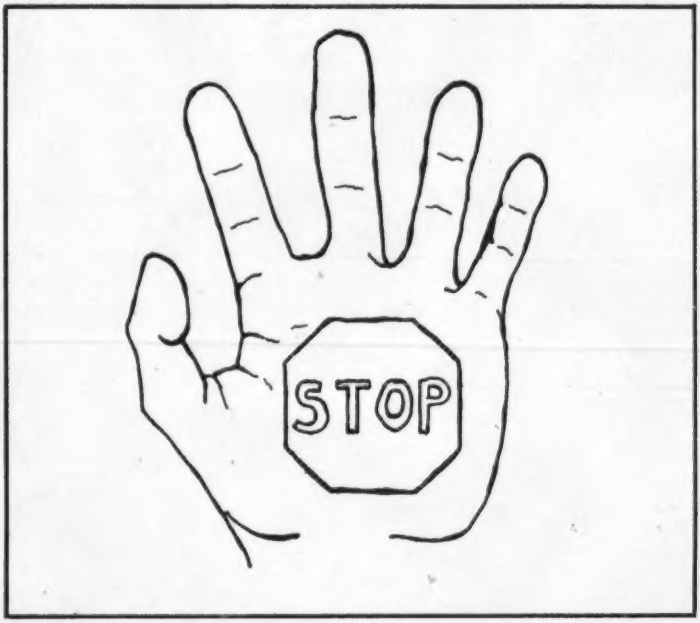
[5]Lawrence J. Stone and Joseph Church, *Childhood and Adolescence: A Psychology of the Growing Person*, 4th ed. (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 438.

the wise parent does not intrude except in cases of dire need, painful as it may often be to all concerned.

What a parent *can* do is to maintain and uphold the values established over the long years of rearing the child, now an adolescent. The adolescent can be expected to desert those values sometimes and to come back to them at other times. Again, it's a matter of trying on hats and deciding what to wear permanently. Important techniques for parents of adolescents are described below.

Trust the adolescent to come through to responsible adulthood. This is a tall order, especially when a parent is worried sick about the adolescent's friends, activities, and attitudes. It is hard to represent family values and trust that the child will eventually adopt them. Take hope in the fact that even adolescence can't last forever, and things will settle eventually.

Provide structure, limits, and standards. Important for a child of any age, these concepts are crucial for the adolescent, who is subject to so much rapid change in himself or herself. Despite objections and



defiance, the adolescent needs the knowledge that some things remain constant and dependable. Reasonable limits and standards also help withstand the well-nigh inevitable testing. If parents fail to uphold their own commitments, the child will continue with more and more testing and will become increasingly anxious because he or she perceives no boundaries, which are needed for a sense of reality.

Let your affection show. Most of us have trouble expressing negative feelings; we're more comfortable with positive emotions. But when the child reaches adolescence, even formerly demonstrative parents may begin to withdraw physically just at the time when the child may need such evidence of understanding.

Let the child go. Letting go can be hard, especially if Mary or Johnny is the first or the last child. The house won't seem the same, it's true. But just as the adolescent must establish an identity, the parent must be willing to permit his or her own identity to change. Following this period the parent will no longer be essential for protecting, nurturing, and teaching; his or her role with the new young adult will have a flavor of colleague to colleague.

It has been said that the main job of a parent is to become dispensable. As the end of adolescence approaches, one can have the gratification of knowing the job has been well done.

The Parents' Responsibility

This chapter will highlight parental responsibility and feelings and how to deal with them. But first it should be said that, exactly as there is no one way to get to heaven, there is no one best way to rear a child. Much of being a parent is an experiment to find out what works, when, and with which child. Few mistakes have lasting effects, and there is always room to try again, using a different touch. One needs to remember two of the important goals of all worthwhile parenting techniques. The first is to establish and maintain a mutually enjoyable and beneficial parent-child relationship. This enables the parent to fulfill the second goal, which is to help the growing child develop internal controls leading to true maturity. To reach these general goals, parents have a choice of many techniques, only a few of which have been mentioned in this booklet.

When to Seek Professional Help

Whatever the techniques selected, parents do have some overall responsibilities. For example, it goes without saying that outside help should be sought when the child demonstrates unusual behavior over a period of time. Occasionally it's hard to make this judgment because what is unusual for one child may be run-of-the-mill for another. And all children go through periods of upset or unhappiness that are a natural part of growing up.

An indication that help may be needed is child behavior that interferes persistently with the enjoyment of relations, activities, or learning. A parent may be too close to the situation; simply talking to an interested outsider may put the behavior in perspective. Both informal and formal parent groups can also offer this kind of help. But if the worrisome behavior continues, it may be time to seek the advice of a professional such as a family doctor, a mental health clinician, a social worker, or a child psychiatrist. Most phone books list community resources, in case you don't know where to turn.

Dealing with Your Feelings

Another general responsibility of the parent is to be alert to his or her own feelings, especially negative ones that may lead to thoughtless behavior. Young children can arouse unbelievably strong passions in the adult because children blithely act out impulses that the adult conquered long ago at the cost of great struggle.

> Two-year-old Toots sat in her high chair eating breakfast. All at once she grabbed the bowl of oatmeal with both hands and turned it upside down on her head, laughing and crowing at her mother as the milk ran down Toots and onto the floor.

When children are messy or violent or simply outrageous, any parent may feel a surprising surge of emotion—frustration, anger, disgust, rage—that can be frightening. How could anybody feel so negative toward a little child, you may ask? Little or not, almost any child can provoke such emotions in almost any parent, even the most loving.

> Mr. T. had spent all Sunday morning locating receipts and canceled checks so that he could figure the income tax. After separating the records into neat piles, he was ready for the calculations; but first he took a break for a cup of coffee.
>
> Ten minutes later he returned to find the records strewn across the floor in a hopeless jumble. He would have to begin all over. Eight-year-old Jerry had opened the window to call the dog, and the wind had done the rest.

Identifying your own feelings and their source will not, of course, take away your anger or irritation, nor should it. It would be unreal not to experience a disagreeable reaction to behavior such as that described. Further, it would be unreal not to express your feelings in some way, preferably orally. Thus, being in touch with feelings can help you tell the child exactly how you feel. Since you are not hiding the results of the child's behavior (your anger or frustration), you are helping the child understand and take responsibility for himself or herself. Also, if you know how you feel, you can anticipate and control what you do as well as what you say in response to your feelings.

This chapter has emphasized being alert to negative or unpleasant feelings because, as noted earlier, most adults have less trouble with their positive reactions. Nevertheless, many of us fail to

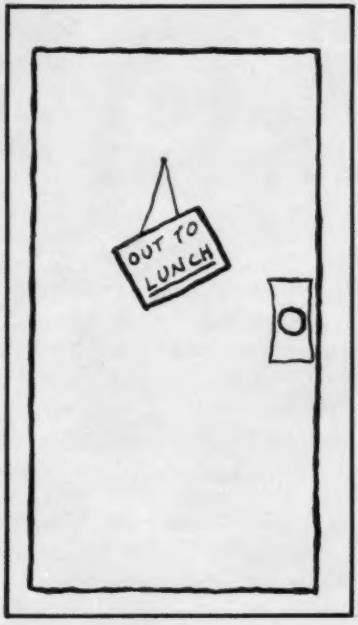
express even these pleasant feelings, for various reasons: fear of spoiling the child, embarrassment, or because it seems superfluous. Affection and approval really do keep the wheels oiled, and they are two of the more comfortable parent jobs.

Who's to Blame?

Several parental responsibilities have been spelled out, but it should be stressed that parents must not go overboard in assuming responsibility. It is common for parents to blame themselves for any and all offenses of their children. This belies the fact that your child, close as he or she may be to you, is still a separate individual, subject to a multitude of other influences such as friends, relatives, teachers, and the child's own perceptions of the world. A parent does the best he or she knows how, but ultimately the child's behavior must be under the child's own control.

Time Out

Beyond considerations having to do with the child, parents owe themselves their own adult interests. Once one has acquired skills, hobbies, and intellectual interests, spending day in and day out only with children can become very wearing. Everybody needs a little corner of time just for himself or herself, to do whatever or to do nothing at all. If there's no way to leave, take time while your child naps. Look at TV, read the paper, stare out the window and daydream, or just sit. But do take time off, even for a few minutes.



Parenting as a Developmental Process

The theme of this booklet has been the changing roles of the parent as the child grows and develops. No matter what the age of the child, none of the parental roles are completely eliminated. Parental roles may be visualized as segments of the circumference of a wheel. The most prominent role is at the top, but only a turn is needed to bring another role into ascendance while the first is temporarily in shadow.

The chief functions of the parent at each of the stages discussed are as follows. For the infant, the parent is the protector and source of nurturance who helps the baby learn to trust an adult. Little emphasis is placed on education, because the baby's cognitive apparatus is still too immature. Instead, the parent seeks appropriate stimuli in order to appeal to and develop the baby's senses, such as sight, touch, and hearing.

For the toddler, the parent provides structure by defining the child's areas of operation and keeping him or her out of danger. The child is allowed to separate and return as part of the effort to establish a rudimentary identity. Because inner controls are very tentative at this stage, the wise parent expects little conformity although the child is quietly absorbing standards.

By the time Johnny or Mary is off to school, academic learning has become a goal, along with solving the challenge of relationships with individuals outside the family. The parent now becomes primarily an educator, helping the child understand the world of school, peer groups, teachers, and others. The parent also helps the child enlarge his or her stock of available behaviors by suggesting alternative ways of acting when things have gone wrong. Another form of education is assigning appropriate responsibilities to the child with the expectation that these will be carried out.

With adolescence, the child recapitulates all the preceding developmental stages, and the parent is hard pressed to keep abreast of the amazing and unpredictable behavior. The parent's

role may be thought of as "good old pa" or "dear old ma." Essentially this means to insist upon limits and values that have always been a part of the family organization and to remain a source of affection and understanding for the child. The symbol that comes to mind is the balance wheel—a device that may be fought, disdained, or disregarded but that can be counted on.

Whatever the stage of the child, common goals for the parent are to keep communication alive; to express feelings, both positive and negative; and to help the child develop inner controls. Aside from these overall goals, the parent is called on to adjust to ever-changing child behavior as the child grows and develops. And the parent's own development should result in his or her ability to release the child to tread a separate path, perhaps not the one the parent would have chosen.

In summary, this booklet has sought to discuss parenting techniques appropriate to four stages of child development, chosen because these are critical points in the child's progress toward maturity. As the child grows and develops, demands on the parent change so that the parent too pursues a developmental course. The parent's flexibility and willingness to bend with the wind of change will determine how parenting affects him or her. Surely any adult with a sense of adventure will perceive parenthood as the challenge of a lifetime.

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Other NCPCA Publications

The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA) distributes and publishes educational materials that deal with a variety of topics, including parenting, child abuse, and child abuse prevention. Written in a conversational style, the publications are excellent reading for professionals, lay persons, and students. In addition, selected publications are available in Spanish. Some NCPCA titles are:

Parenting

What Every Parent Should Know (English and Spanish)

Child Discipline: Guidelines for Parents (English and Spanish)

Growth and Development through Parenting

How to Grow a Parents Group

Child Abuse Prevention

Child Abuse: A Plan for Prevention

NCPCA Community Plan for Preventing Child Abuse

Child Abuse: A Primary Prevention Annotated Bibliography

You Can Prevent Child Abuse (English and Spanish)

Hope for the Children

Child Abuse

A Look at Child Abuse

Understanding Sexual Child Abuse, Vol. 1

Dealing with Sexual Child Abuse, Vol. 2

Basic Facts about Sexual Child Abuse

Think You Know Something about Child Abuse? (English and Spanish)

Together on Main Street (A film to recruit volunteers)

General Topics

The Help Book

Fund Raising in the Private Sector

Networking: What's It All About?

Special Subjects

The Educator and Child Abuse

Child Abuse and the Law: A Legal Primer for Social Workers

Independent Representation for the Abused and Neglected Child: The Guardian Ad Litem

Annotated Bibliography of Legal Articles on Child Abuse

National Newsletter

NCPCA publishes the national newsletter *Caring*. Single copies are free to NCPCA members.

New publications are added regularly to NCPCA's array of literature. For more information about the above titles as well as for new publications, write for the *NCPCA Catalog*, which is available free upon request from the Publishing Department, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1250, Chicago, IL 60604. The catalog includes membership information, describes each publication, and gives price and ordering directions.